

FY 2024 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION BUDGET BRIEF

Maura T. Healey, Governor | Kimberley Driscoll, Lt. Governor

Food Security

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Introduction

Reliable access to fresh, affordable, and nutritious food is the foundation for a healthy life. From farm to table, the Healey-Driscoll administration is recommending investments to ensure Massachusetts residents continue to have access to healthy meals. 21 percent of families with children in the state currently face food insecurity. As the cost of living continues to rise, residents need increased support to keep food on the table. Across state government, the administration is making investments in food distribution, food affordability, and nutrition programs, as well as improving the infrastructure needed to ensure vulnerable residents have timely access to fresh and nutritious food to feed their families.



\$25 Million towards Food Security Infrastructure



Supports over 36 Million Meals



Over 1.5 Million SNAP recipients

Supporting our Farmers

Our investment in food security starts with supporting our farmers to ensure the agricultural infrastructure of the state will thrive. The FY24 H.1 budget recommendation includes \$25 million for Food Security Infrastructure Grants (FSIG) to build the infrastructure necessary for local food economies to flourish – connecting farmers, fisherman, and other local food producers to a strong, resilient food system. These grants are awarded at all levels, from farmers and distributors to food banks and municipalities. Previously funded through one-time federal and capital sources, these grants have already begun making food more accessible by lowering the cost of production and helping distributors partner with the Department of Transitional Assistance to accept SNAP benefits. H.1 recommends a sustainable funding source for this critical program going forward.

Direct Access to Meals

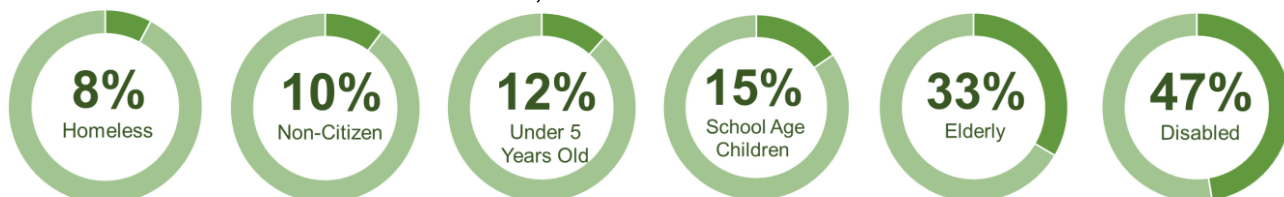
For over twenty-five years, Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) has been ensuring residents across the Commonwealth have access to quality food. MEFAP distributes meals via four regional food bank distribution centers: the Greater Boston Food Bank, the Merrimack Valley Food Bank, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, and the Worcester County Food Bank. H.1 includes \$31.7 million for MEFAP, a 4% increase over FY23 GAA to provide over 27 million meals to residents. This represents a 20% increase in the number of meals over pre-pandemic levels.

In its first FY23 supplemental budget recommendation, the Healey-Driscoll administration filed for \$65 million to ensure universal access to school meals for the remainder of the school year, as part of a one-year extension of the federally-funded program that ended in 2022. In the upcoming supplemental budget, the administration will recommend extending the program for another year with Transitional Escrow funds. These investments will ensure that the Commonwealth's children can focus on their education, rather than on when their next meal will be. The budget recommendation also invests almost \$8 million in the Safe Haven Program to provide meals to those experiencing homelessness in the state.

H.1 recommends fully funding the Nutrition Services Program at the Department of Elder Affairs at \$11 million, which provides over nine million meals to seniors each year through 27 programs, including the Senior Farm Share Program and Meals on Wheels. The Senior Farm Share Program allows low-income seniors to purchase a share of a farm in return for ten weeks of fresh, local produce that is delivered to participating Senior Centers and Councils on Aging. Seniors can also use their SNAP benefits to enroll. Massachusetts Meals on Wheels serves meals directly to seniors. These services not only provide healthy meals but also food tailored to the individual, considering dietary restrictions and cultural backgrounds.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Funded through the federal government, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) helps families buy food. Massachusetts normally shares the cost of administering SNAP with the federal government. However, because the extra COVID SNAP benefits are being discontinued in March 2023 due to federal action, the administration proposed in its FY23 supplemental budget to additionally provide \$130 million for an off-ramp to the abrupt end of these extra benefits for over 630,000 families:



In that same FY23 supplemental budget, the administration filed for \$2 million to reimburse clients who have been victims of SNAP theft. H.1 builds upon these investments by recommending funding for technology to improve the security of these SNAP benefits.

H.1 also recommends funding the Healthy Incentive Program (HIP) at \$5 million, which would be supplemented by an estimated \$8 million in unspent FY23 funds. HIP improves access to fresh, locally grown produce for SNAP recipients by providing extra funding on SNAP recipients' EBT cards to purchase fruits and vegetables and supports clients who wish to grow their own.

In addition, H.1 supports the costs of implementing the new Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (Summer EBT) program, which replaces the Pandemic-EBT program. Starting in the summer of 2024, families with young children who receive SNAP benefits or who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals will have access to supplemental EBT benefits of \$40 per child per month to purchase food for their families during the summer.